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THE MAROONS OF JAMAICA.

BY LADY BLAKE.

THE Maroons of Jamaica are an interesting people. Though coming of the same race as the other negroes, they look down on the latter and hold them in contempt, their theory being that Maroons were never slaves to the English.

When the Spaniards finally quitted Jamaica, after a guerilla warfare that lasted for three years, they left behind them a certain number of their slaves, to whom they gave liberty on the understanding that the black men were to wage unceasing war against the English interlopers. These freed slaves retreated to the mountains, where they secured positions inaccessible to the English soldiers, and, with willing fidelity to the oath given to their Spanish masters, they were in the habit of sallying forth, killing, when possible, the new arrivals, destroying or carrying off their property. When such raids became unbearably aggressive, expeditions were organized and bodies of troops and militia were sent to reduce the Maroons to order. These expeditions are known in Jamaica history as the Maroon Wars, which continued with more or less frequency for over a century. Meantime, the Maroons were daily increasing in numbers by the addition of runaway slaves, who must have been numerous, for it was calculated, at one time, that in the towns alone of Jamaica twenty thousand runaway slaves were living, successfully eluding all attempts made to apprehend them. There is no record as to how many took refuge with the Maroons, but the number must have been considerable, and largely consisted of Coromantees. The Coromantees were a tribe so fierce and turbulent, that, after disastrous experience of the difficulty and risk of attempting to turn Coromantees into satisfactory investments in the island, the

Jamaica Legislature in "slavery days" passed a law forbidding the importation of any more of the tribe.

Recruited from this source, the Maroons daily became more formidable. The hills in which they had ensconced themselves were well nigh inaccessible to Europeans, or even to the "Black-shot," who accompanied them. The latter were confidential slaves, armed and equipped as soldiers to assist their masters. The Maroons gained access to their fastnesses by narrow paths known only to themselves. Such paths, or, more properly, tracks, were easily obliterated, and by bending bushes and breaking twigs the Maroons easily decoyed their pursuers in the wrong direction. Once off the track, the ground was almost impassable; the jagged and pointed honeycombed rocks tore the boots and cut the feet like razors. To force one's way through tropical undergrowth or "bush," as it is known to the inhabitants of the tropics, is, under any circumstances, a difficult matter; but, in the district which was the principal stronghold of the Maroons, the difficulty was increased a hundredfold by deep fissures, which traverse the limestone rock in all directions. High cones containing deep hollows, known locally as "cock-pits," stud the face of the land in close proximity. An eye witness of the Maroon "war" of 1795 thus describes these cock-pits, into some of which it is possible to descend by climbing, while the interior of others can only be reached by being lowered into it by ropes. "After ascending and descending a number of steep and rugged mountains, our party passed by a cock-pit of the second size, and halted for a few minutes to reconnoitre it. It seemed about five or six hundred feet in depth; the hills around it were in some parts nearly perpendicular, the breadth of the area below seemed not to exceed two hundred feet, and a narrow defile led into it on one side. It had the appearance, to the spectator, standing on the summit of one of the heights of the surrounding mountains, of a vast funnel with its focus downward. Trees of immense height grew on its sides, some of whose tops waved far beneath us."

Every now and then, the way was blocked by an abrupt and almost perpendicular precipice, up which the invaders had to ascend in single file, assisting themselves by projections in the rock and the boughs of the trees that sprung from the clefts in the rock. Each man handed his musket or "fusee," as the writer in question calls it, to his comrade who had gained the ledge

above him, and so the expedition toiled pantingly upwards; often a climb of the kind was but a prelude to a steeper and more difficult descent on the opposite side of the mountain. The cock-pit country is almost destitute of water; so porous is the rock that the rivers run in caverns far underground. In the whole district there are only one or two far distant springs, and these were carefully guarded by the Maroons, who alone were acquainted with their whereabouts. When on hunting expeditions in pursuit of wild hogs or agoutis, the Maroons had to slake their thirst with the water stored at the base of the leaves of the wild bromelias (wild pines, as they are called in Jamaica), or with the sap of the water-witty, a species of wild grape, the stem of which contains a pure and colorless sap, wholesome and tasteless as good water. The stem is cut through about a couple of feet from the ground, and the water drunk as it flows freely from the hanging witty. If the vine is then severed about six feet higher up and the upper end kept elevated, nearly a quart of cool and refreshing water may be obtained from a stem an inch and a half or so in diameter. The white soldiers were unacquainted with the resources of the forests, and in any case water by itself would have been regarded by the soldiers of the last century as poor comfort, so a portion of the *impedimenta* on these expeditions consisted of huge joints of bamboo, which were filled with grog. At night the men had to lie down to rest on the bare ground, wrapped in the great coats that had been such wearisome burdens during the heat of the day. But though the night brought coolness—for the nights in Jamaica are almost invariably cool and refreshing on a campaign in the bush—they often failed to bring repose to white men, as often as not parched with thirst and almost always in such localities tormented by mosquitoes.

In this kind of warfare, the suffering and loss were usually on the side of the so-called "victors." Guerrilla fighting in the tropics is not a mode of waging war to which English soldiers easily adapt themselves. Their spirits were depressed by such a scene as that described by one of them. In entering a narrow defile between two high precipices, where some time previously a number of their comrades had fallen into a Maroon ambush, they "beheld with horror the unburied skeletons of the victims who had fallen, most of whose heads had been cut off

and stuck on the stumps of trees, while their carcasses were left a prey to the devouring carrion crow." In one of these "wars," we read of sixty-seven killed and twenty-three being wounded on the side of the English, while of the Maroons not a man was known to have fallen. Then, there were horrible misgivings as to the fate of the wounded who fell into the hands of the enemy. "Some of them had been wounded and fallen alive into the hands of the savages, who doubtless would cause them to die a death of protracted tortures, attended by every horrible insult." So difficult was progress through those wild districts that a certain Capt. Oldham, of the Sixty-second Regiment, had "perished through fatigue." Houses and estates were burnt by the Maroons, slaves and property carried off, and yet the troops could rarely succeed in coming up with the agile mountaineers, and all efforts to coop them up in certain limits proved vain.

The English attempts to overcome the Maroons were almost as ineffectual as the Spanish efforts to reduce the Cuban insurgents, and the circumstances in both cases were somewhat alike. It is no wonder that anxiety and apprehension cast a gloom over the whole island. The state of affairs was becoming intolerable and was, of course, to the last degree detrimental to the colony; it was necessary to bring the Maroons to terms in any way that was feasible. Treaties had been made with the Maroons in 1738 and 1739; by the terms of these treaties, certain tracts of land were granted to the Maroons free of taxation. The Maroons were to come to the assistance of the government against domestic or foreign foes whenever called upon to do so; their captain or headman was to inflict any punishment among their men for crimes committed by them, short of the punishment of death; the Maroons were to restore all runaway slaves to their owners, receiving a reward for so doing as the legislature should appoint, and in each of their settlements or "towns," as they were called, two white men were always to reside. Such were the principal stipulations of the treaties, in which were also several minor clauses. For some years after these treaties were made there was peace with the Maroons, but in 1773 they again became discontented, and before long were once more upon the warpath.

The appointment of an unpopular superintendent (the white men who resided in the Maroon towns were called superintendents) was one cause of displeasure to the Maroons, but the immediate

cause of the outbreak was that, at Montego Bay (a town on the north shore of the island), the magistrates had imprudently allowed two Maroons, found guilty of stealing a couple of pigs from a poor man, to be flogged by a negro slave. Had the sentence been executed by a white man, no fault would have been found with it, but to be flogged by a negro slave, a slave, moreover, whom the Maroons themselves had previously arrested and lodged in the workhouse, was an indignity which they bitterly resented. As the two culprits left the town after their punishment and passed through the plantations on their way back to the mountains, they were jeered at and hooted by the exultant slaves, who were, of course, overjoyed at the humiliation of those who so often frustrated the slaves in their attempts to abscond, and restored them to their owners. Their resentment was speedily shown by active measures, and outrages and pillage spread far and wide over the island, till at length the governor, Lord Balcarres, in person, proceeded to take the field against the Maroons, accompanied by a strong force of soldiers of the regular army, militia and "black-shot." Lord Balcarres established his headquarters at a place called Vaughan's Field, and from there dispatched a strong expedition against a Maroon stronghold. The detachment was, however, defeated with heavy loss, its commander, Col. Sandford, a Col. Gallimore and many others being among those who were killed. Defeat followed defeat, in spite of the large force at command of the authorities. Victory was always on the side of the Maroons. These continued disasters spread consternation through the whole island, and at length the position became so serious that it was realized that, if things continued in such an unsatisfactory state, there was danger of losing the colony completely. A chance conversation between a Col. Quarrell and a Spaniard whom he happened to meet suggested to the authorities a new and more effectual means of subduing the enemy. It appeared that, some years before, when the British abandoned the Mosquito Shore to the Spaniards, the latter had found it impossible to take possession of the new territory, so fierce and crafty was the resistance opposed to them by the native Indians. In a few months nearly three whole regiments had fallen victims to ambushes and the Indian mode of warfare, till at length the Spanish commander bethought him of sending to Cuba for some of the trained bloodhounds which were used in

pursuing fugitive slaves in the dense forests that clothe the "Queen of the Antilles." These auxiliaries had proved completely successful on the Mosquito Shore, and the native Indians in a short time were reduced to subjection. It struck Col. Quarrell that what had succeeded on the Mosquito Shore might be equally effective in Jamaica, the Maroons' mode of warfare being very similar to that of the Indians.

Much indignation has been expressed at the barbarity of using these dogs. To use them might, of course, have been barbarous and, no doubt, they were at times used in a way that was cruel, but it was by no means necessary that there should have been any cruelty in making use of the animal's instinct in following a track and detecting an ambush, except in so far that all pursuit must occasion dread to the creature pursued. Every bloodhound had its own keeper or Chasseur, and when tracking fugitives the dog was held by a rope which was fastened to the belt worn by its Chasseur. A perfectly trained dog, even if set free by its keeper, would not kill the object it pursued unless resisted, but on coming up with a fugitive the animal barked till the runaway stopped, when the dog would crouch near him, keeping guard till the Chasseur came up. The dogs were almost constantly muzzled, the muzzle and collar being joined together. Ferocious the Cuban bloodhounds undoubtedly were; their very name was one of terror to the black people. After considerable difficulty, a commissioner being dispatched expressly to Cuba at last succeeded in obtaining the assistance of a certain number of Chasseurs and their dogs for service against the Maroons in Jamaica, it being stipulated that they were not to be detained in Jamaica beyond three months without a new agreement being made.

The arrival of the Spaniards and their bloodhounds—both the dogs and their keepers presenting a wild and formidable appearance—caused consternation and terror to the negroes of Jamaica, and the reports of the ferocity and prowess of these auxiliaries that reached the Maroons effected what the soldiers had failed in doing, and the Maroons at the suggestion of Major-General Walpole sued for peace and a "treaty." The history of that treaty is as little creditable as that of the more famous one of Limerick. General Walpole had assured the Maroons that none of those who surrendered should be sent off the island. The Jamaica House of

Assembly refused to agree to this, and decided that the Trelawney Town Maroons, who were the chief offenders in the recent troubles, were to be transported to Nova Scotia. Accordingly, some six hundred of those who, relying on the assurance of the English general, had laid down their arms and surrendered, were shipped off to Nova Scotia, from whence—the climate of Nova Scotia proving too severe for them—they were eventually removed to Sierra Leone. The House of Assembly voted a sum of five hundred guineas for the purpose of purchasing a sword to be presented to Gen. Walpole, but the general so greatly resented the perfidy that he considered had been shown in not respecting the conditions of his agreement with the Maroons, that he declined to receive the sword, assuring the House “that not any person would receive their favors with more gratitude than I should, could I possibly do it with credit to myself.”

The Trelawney Town Maroons banished, the inhabitants of other Maroon settlements were left undisturbed, and their descendants still remain in Jamaica. Their privileges have been respected, and they have proved themselves faithful allies and friends of the white people of the island. In slavery days they received a reward for every runaway slave brought back by them. Their zeal in obtaining such reward was unflagging, rendering them objects of dread to the slaves and keeping up the link that bound them to the white people. A visit to a Maroon settlement, even at the present day, is an interesting experience. There is one Maroon settlement—that of Moore Town, on the northern slope of the John Crow Mountains—to which there is a road practicable for wheeled vehicles; the other settlements can only be gained by bridle paths which wind through wood and bush, skirting steep declivities, thickly clothed with the luxuriant foliage of the tropics, the path now descending into a shady glade, now mounting over some towering crest fringed with the stately cabbage palm or beautiful with clumps of magnificent tree ferns. When the Maroons desire to do honor to expected guests, a certain number of them await the party two or three miles from their settlement and escort them into their “town,” as the cluster of huts is termed. On such occasions, the Maroons cover themselves with trails of moss, ferns or branches of trees, wound round their bodies and heads till they look like so many May day Jacks-in-the-green. This, in Maroon parlance, is their “Civez,” and its use

is obvious, for when on the warpath it renders them almost indistinguishable when they are creeping through the bush. When escorting their visitors, the men fire off their muskets at intervals, executing at the same time strange twists and contortions of their bodies, which often prove very trying to the nerves of the ponies ridden by the visitors. The "Abeng," or horn, is blown with great fervor. This is the signal horn of the Maroons; every Maroon who hears it sounded is bound immediately to resort to their appointed trysting place. The abeng is only a rough cow horn, but with it the Maroons can convey information to each other and exchange signals at a considerable distance. I once asked one of them if anyone could blow the abeng.

"No one but a Maroon," was the answer.

"How do the Maroons learn to blow it?" I continued.

"They don't learn," replied the man; "it's in the blood of the Maroons to blow the abeng!"

To receive their visitors in due style at the settlement, the Maroons await them drawn up in a body, the men brandishing hog spears or firing off muskets; all wear the "Civez," while the women spring wildly up and down, clapping their hands and whirling round and round, working themselves into a state of great excitement. It is a wild and most picturesque scene. The men engage in mimic combats, some kneeling down and pretending to take aim, others gesticulating and dancing in a barbaric fashion, the women waving their arms and leaping into the air, while shots are fired, abengs blown and the whole assembly shout and sing at the top of their voices. On such an occasion I have seen a Maroon fling himself headlong into a river in a sort of fit caused by excitement; and a woman throw herself on the ground and roll over and over down the slope on which she had been standing. It is etiquette for the Maroon women, or "ladies," as they prefer being called, to dust their guests all over with their handkerchiefs. I mentioned this custom of the Maroons once to a Spanish gentleman, who told me that, in Cuba and in the remoter parts of Spain, a similar dusting is to the present day practiced by the country people as a mark of respect.

The Maroons, like all the negroes in Jamaica, are now members of some Christian church or sect, but till the beginning of this century they continued, like their forefathers, their belief in Accompong, god of the heavens and creator of all things; however,

they offered no sacrifices, and seemed to have paid him small regard. The principal Maroon settlement in the island still bears the name of their original deity. They were and are steadfast believers in the power of Obeah and many of them are said to be adepts in its unlawful practices.

In the "good old days now gone by," a Maroon might have as many wives as he pleased, but few had more than two, on account of the expense, for on making a present to one wife, the husband was obliged to bestow a gift of equal value on each of the others. When a girl was old enough to be married it was usual for the parents to kill a pig to make a feast for their neighbors, rum flowed plentifully and the people amused themselves dancing and singing. Each guest was expected to place a small piece of money in the girl's mouth. This entertainment was the intimation on the part of the family that the eligible young men might come forward with their suits. The girl's debut in Maroon parlance was called "she hab killed hog !"

The Maroons have their full share of superstitions common to all negroes, and these, as is usually the case in the West Indies, are curiously blended with the beliefs and usages of Christianity. Not very long ago a Maroon girl died at one of the settlements in the John Crow Mountains. The coffin was being carried down the hill to be buried at a place called Ginger Hall, where other Maroons were interred. Suddenly, so it was reported, the coffin "wheeled round." This was regarded as a sign that prayers and hymns in sufficient numbers had not been offered up and sung before the procession started, so the bearers turned back to the house and sung and prayed anew. Then again they set out, but this time the coffin not only wheeled round, but to the horror of those present, the lid proceeded to come off also. There could be no mistake about a sign like this ! The Maroons consulted together, and came to the conclusion that the corpse objected to being buried at Ginger Hall, and that the best thing to be done was to bury it where they were; so a grave was dug by the side of the path and the coffin duly buried. The Maroons were well aware that there were reasons why the corpse should object to Ginger Hall as its resting place. The father of the girl who lay in that coffin had killed his brother for having stolen two whole quarts of sugar from him. That murdered uncle was buried at Ginger Hall, and it was known that his *duppy*

had declared its intention of doing for all his brother's family. There were indeed rumors that the girl's neck had been broken in a mysterious and unaccountable manner before she died. Altogether, under such circumstances, the bush by the mountain path was a safer resting place than Ginger Hall for the girl's body.

In the disastrous outbreak of 1865, the Maroons from the John Crow Mountains came gallantly to the rescue of the white inhabitants of St. Thomas in the East who had escaped massacre. It is said that on this occasion their zeal sometimes outran their discretion, and when they found themselves again on the warpath the old savage joy in slaying for the sake of killing revived, and that many negroes who had taken no part in the murders and pillage were shot by the excited and infuriated Maroons. If report does not belie them, in several instances the Maroons cut off the ears of their victims, which they proceeded to fry and eat. This was, however, done, not from brutality, but as a precaution to prevent the *duppies* of the slain from hearing the footsteps of the Maroons and starting in pursuit of them.

The ideas and ways of the Maroons are African at root, with a superficial graft of Evangelicalism that forms an odd combination. The upset of law and order that followed the outbreak at Morant Bay was a favorable opportunity for taking the law into their own hands, and the Maroons were not slow to seize it to pay off old scores. They came down from the mountains and encamped in the little village of Bath, where at night the street was ablaze with their campfires, round which they danced fantastic war dances to the sound of the tom-tom, a drum made by stretching a goatskin over the end of a hollow tree trunk. Two or three miles from Bath, at a little hamlet called Airy Castle, lived a colored man against whom the chief man of the Maroons had a grudge. It was the moment for paying it off, so the chief or captain (as the Maroon leaders are called) dispatched some of his followers with directions to hang his enemy. The men performed the job to the best of their ability, and the captain went to feast his eyes on his suspended foe, when to his annoyance he found that a mistake had been made, and that the person hung by his men was not the man who had incurred his displeasure. However, the wrong man was dead and there was no help for it, so the disappointed captain and his followers proceeded on

their way. As they marched along the main road, whom should the captain espy but the real man who had incurred his displeasure. No time was lost; the man was seized, and on this occasion the captain saw that the right man was hung. But, however reckless in administering punishment to the insurgents, the Maroons did good service and saved many white women and children, who, but for them, would have fallen into the hands of the lawless and maddened negroes. In one instance, several European women and their children who had fled into the woods, took refuge in the hut of a Maroon woman. Before long a number of negroes, rendered ferocious and reckless by the scenes of bloodshed and robbery that were taking place in the district, were seen running toward the hut. The Maroon woman desired the trembling fugitives to have no fear, to remain where they were and not to attempt to fly. She then left the hut and, addressing the shrieking and excited rabble, warned them that she was a Maroon, and that if they dared to enter her hut or to lay a finger on those to whom she had given refuge, her people would avenge it and would make them pay a reckoning they would never forget. The negroes, having a wholesome fear of Maroon vengeance before their eyes, did as the woman bade them and departed, leaving the hut and the refugees in it unharmed.

The Maroons have the failings of a wild and half civilized people; they are idle; to beg they are not ashamed, they can steal upon occasion and not feel much shame when detected. When aroused they are fierce and vindictive, but they have on the other hand a large share of untutored virtues. They are courteous, loyal to their word, faithful to their friends, active and plucky. Such people are not to be despised, and it is to be hoped that "those in authority over them" will never give them cause to change the Maroon opinion that their *raison d'être* is—to put it in the words of a Maroon—"to protect strangers and to put down rebels."

EDITH BLAKE